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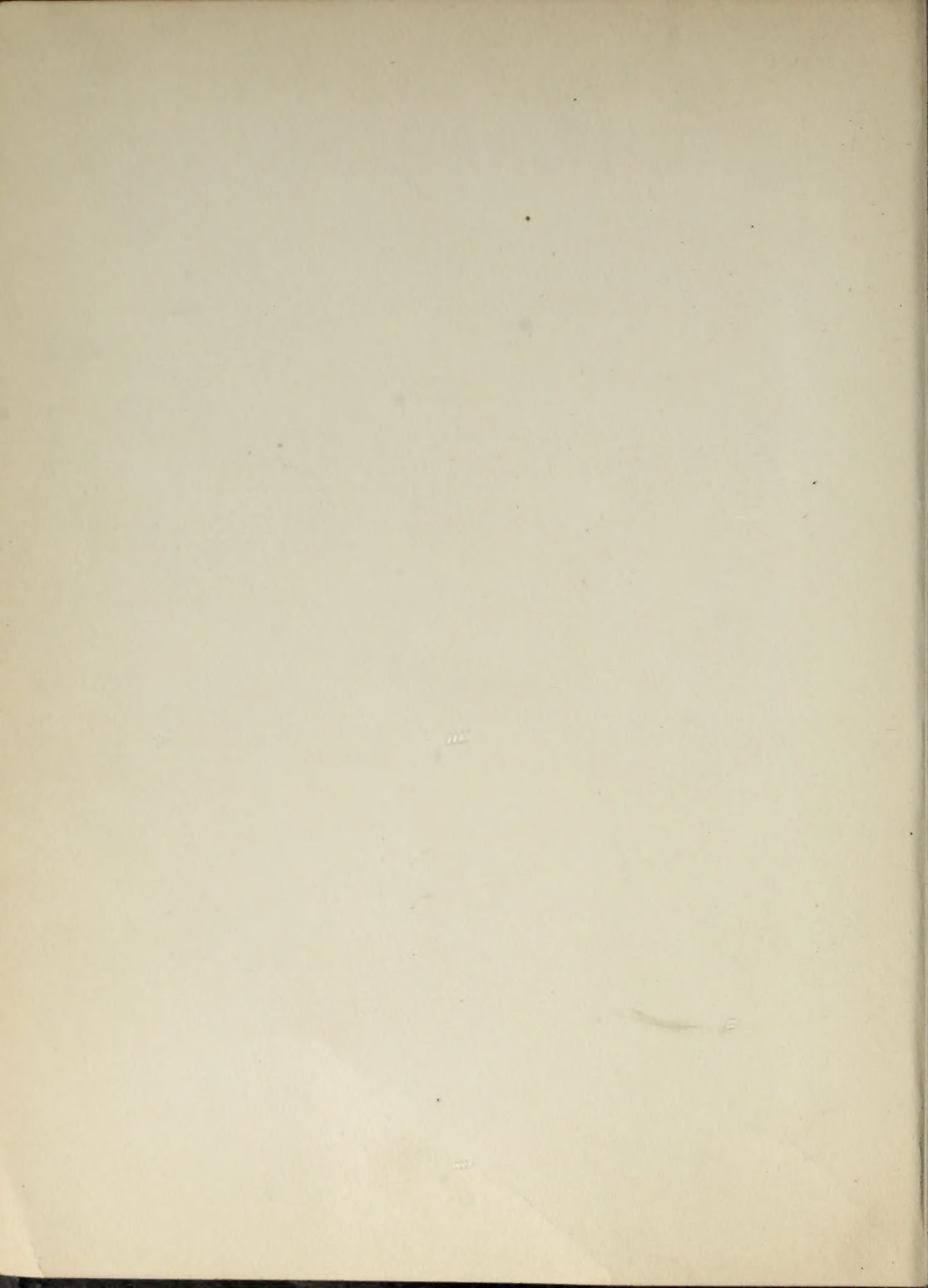


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WITHDRAWN



The Poor Count's Christmas



THE POOR COUNT'S CHRISTMAS

BY
FRANK R. STOCKTON

WITH SEVEN BLACK AND WHITE ILLUSTRATIONS
FROM DRAWINGS BY

E. B. BENSELL



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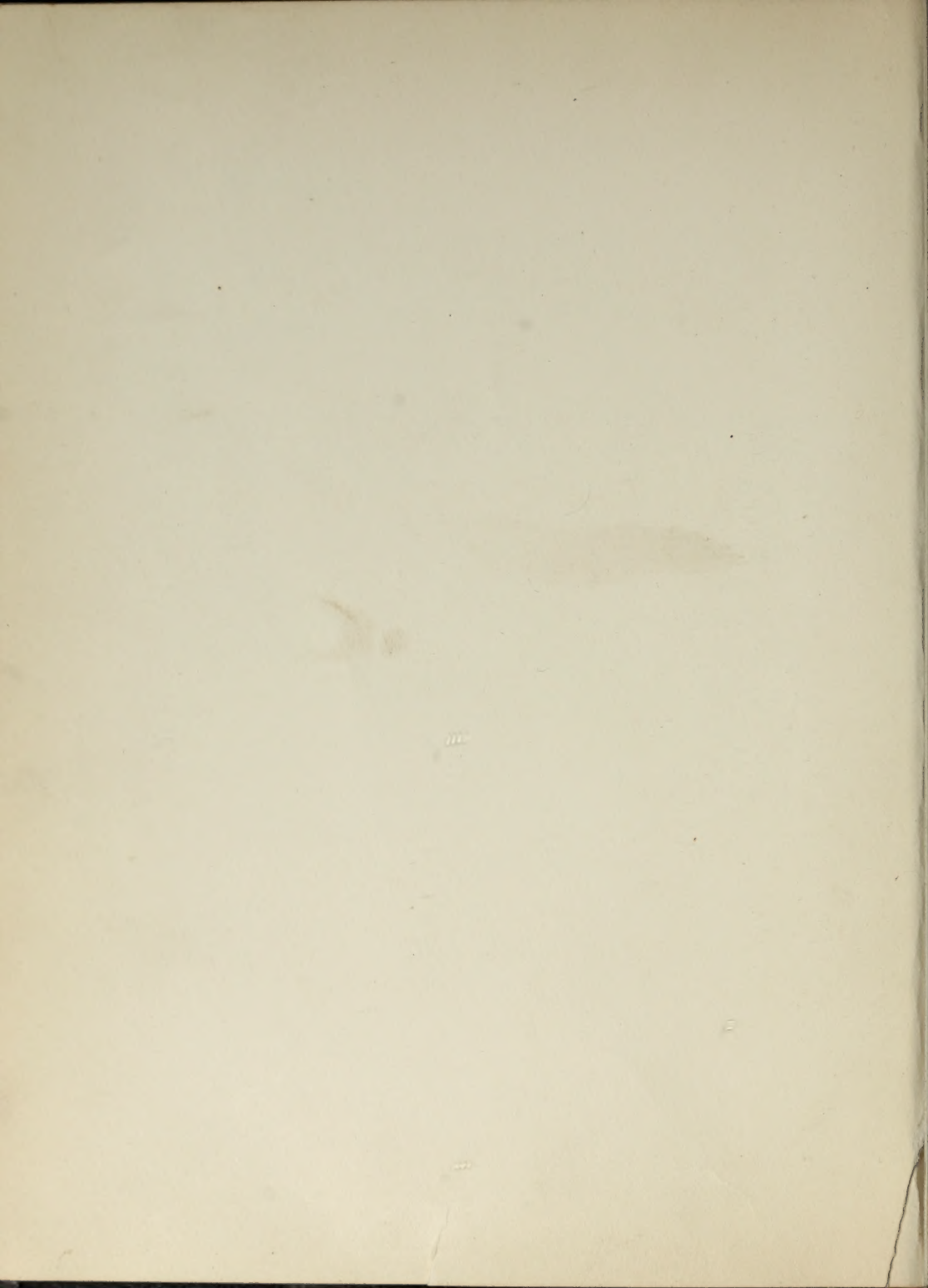
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ILLUSTRATIONS

All the children began to dance gayly around the tree . (*in colors*) *Frontispiece*

FACING
PAGE

The young giant was talking to a little fairy perched on his fore- finger	18
The young giant Feldar compels the warden to open the sick giant's castle-gate	30
Feldar interviews the sick giant	36
The young giant's way of getting the key	44
Quite a procession was approaching the gate	58
The Count and his happy guests enjoy the Christmas feast . .	70
Count Corno adopts the young giant	76



The Poor Count's Christmas



THE POOR COUNT'S CHRISTMAS



VERY many years ago there lived a noble Count, who was one of the kindest and best-hearted men in the world. Every day in the year he gave to the poor and helped the friendless, but it was at the merry Christmas-time that his goodness shone brightest. He had even vowed a vow that, as far as he was able to make them so, every child he knew should be happy Christmas-day.

The Poor Count's Christmas

Early every Christmas morning each boy and girl in the neighborhood who was old enough, and not too old, came to the castle of the Count Cormo, and there the Count and Countess welcomed them all, rich or poor, and through the whole day there were games, and festive merry-making, and good things to eat, and fun of every kind, and besides all this, there was a grand Christmas-tree, with a present on it for each of the eager, happy youngsters who stood around it.

But although the good Count had a castle and rich lands, he gave away so much money that he became

The Poor Count's Christmas

poorer and poorer, so that at last he and his wife often found it hard to get the clothes and food they absolutely needed.

But this made no difference with the Christmas festivities. The Count was not now able to be very generous during the year, although he was always willing to divide a meal with a hungry person; but he managed so that the children could have their festival and their presents at Christmas. Year by year he had sold for this purpose some of the beautiful things which the castle contained, so that now there was scarcely enough furniture left for

The Poor Count's Christmas

the actual use of himself and the Countess.

One night, about a week before Christmas, the Count and his wife sat in the great hall before a fire smaller and poorer than those which burned on the hearth of most of the cottagers in the surrounding country, for the cottagers could go into the woods and pick up sticks and twigs, whereas the Count had sold all his forests, so that he could not cut wood; and he had only one old man for outdoor work, and he had already picked up all the fallen branches within a wide circuit of the castle.

The Poor Count's Christmas

"Well, one thing is certain," said the Countess Corno, as she drew her chair nearer to the little pile of burning sticks, "and that is that we can not have the children here at Christmas this year."

"Why not?" asked the Count.

"Because we have nothing to give them," replied his wife. "We have nothing for them to eat, nothing to put on the tree, and no money to buy anything. What would be the good of their coming when we have nothing at all for them?"

"But we must have something," said the Count. "Think of all the

The Poor Count's Christmas

years that we have had these Christmas gatherings, and then think how hard it would be, both for us and the little ones, to give them up now we are growing old; and we may not be with the children another year. There are yet several days before Christmas; I can sell something to-morrow, and we can have the tree and everything prepared in time. There will not be so much to eat as usual, and the presents will be smaller, but it will be our good old Christmas in spite of that."

"I should like very much to know what you are going to sell,"

The Poor Count's Christmas

asked the Countess. "I thought we had already parted with everything that we could possibly spare."

"Not quite," said the Count. "There is our old family bedstead. It is very large; it is made of the most valuable woods, and it is inlaid with gold and silver. It will surely bring a good price."

"Sell the family bedstead!" cried the Countess. "The bedstead on which your ancestors, for generations, have slept and died! How could you even think of such a thing! And what are we going to sleep on, I'd like to know?"

"Oh, we can get along very

The Poor Count's Christmas

well," said the Count. "There is a small bedstead which you can have, and I will sleep on the floor. I would much rather do that than have the children disappointed at Christmas-time."

"On the floor! at your age!" exclaimed the Countess. "It will be the death of you! But if you have made up your mind, I suppose there is no use in my saying anything more about it."

"Not the least in the world," replied her husband, with a smile; and so she said no more.



It was on the morning of the next day that there came through the forest, not very far from the Count Cormo's castle, a tall young giant. As he strode along, he appeared to be talking to the forefinger of his right hand, which he held up before him. He was not, however, talking to his forefinger, but to a little fairy who was sitting on it, chatting away in a very lively manner.

"And so," said this little creature, "you are two hundred miles

The Poor Count's Christmas

from your own home! What in the world made you take so long a journey?"

"I don't call it very long," replied the giant; "and I had to take it. There was nothing else to do. You see I have nothing to eat, or almost nothing, in my castle, and a person can't get along that way. He must go and see about things."

"And what are you going to see about?" asked the fairy.

"I am going to see if my grandfather's uncle is dead. He is very rich and I am one of his heirs. When I get my share of his money, I shall be quite comfortable."



THE YOUNG GIANT WAS TALKING TO A LITTLE FAIRY
PERCHED ON HIS FOREFINGER



The Poor Count's Christmas

"It seems to me," said the fairy, "that it is a very poor way of living, to be waiting for other people's money."

"It is so," replied the giant. "I'm tired of it. I've been waiting ever since I was a little boy."

The fairy saw that her companion had not exactly understood her remark, but she said no more about it. She merely added, "It seems strange to hear you say that you once were little."

"Oh, yes, I was," said the giant. "At one time I was no taller than a horse."

"Astonishing!" said the fairy,

The Poor Count's Christmas

making believe to be very much surprized. "Now, when I was a baby, I was about the size of a pea."

This made the giant laugh, but he said he supposed it must have been so, considering the present size, and then he said: "Talking of peas reminds me that I am hungry. We must stop somewhere, and ask for something to eat."

"That will suit me very well, but don't let us go to the same place," said the fairy. "I expect you are dreadfully hungry."

"All right," replied the other. "There is a great house over in

The Poor Count's Christmas

the valley, not more than fifteen miles away. I'll just step over there, and you can go to Count Cormo's castle. I'll take you to the edge of the woods. When you've had your dinner, come back to this oak, and I'll meet you; I've heard the Count is getting very poor, but he'll have enough for you."

So the giant put the fairy down on the ground, and she skipped along to the castle, while he stepped over to the house in the valley.

In an hour or two they met again at the great oak, and, the giant taking up his little friend

The Poor Count's Christmas

on his forefinger, they continued their journey.

“You told me that Count Cormo was poor,” she said, “but I don’t believe you know how poor he really is. When I went there, he and his wife had just finished their dinner, and were sitting before the fire-place. I didn’t notice any fire in it. They were busy talking, and so I did not disturb them, but just climbed up on the table to see what I could find to eat. You haven’t any idea what a miserable meal they must have had. Of course there was enough left for me, for I need only a few crumbs,

The Poor Count's Christmas

but everything was so hard and stale that I could scarcely eat it. I don't see how they can live in that way. But after the meal, when I heard them talking, I found out how poor they really were."

"It wasn't exactly the proper thing to sit there and listen to them, was it?" asked the giant.

"Perhaps not," said the fairy, "but I did want to hear what they were saying. So I sat quite still. They were talking about the Christmas-tree, and all the other good things they give the children every year; and although they are so

The Poor Count's Christmas

poor, they are going to do just the same this year."

"I don't see how they can," said the giant.

"The Count is going to sell his family bedstead," replied his companion.

The young giant stopped short in the path.

"You don't mean to say," he exclaimed, "that the celebrated family bedstead of the Corno family is to be sold to give the children a Christmas-tree!"

"That is exactly what I mean," replied the fairy.

"Well, well, well!" said the giant,

The Poor Count's Christmas

resuming his walk. "I never heard of such a thing in all my born days. It's dreadful; it's pitiful!"

"Indeed it is," said the fairy.

"It ought to be stopped," added the giant. "He shouldn't be allowed to do such a thing."

"Indeed he shouldn't," the fairy said.

And thus they went on lamenting and regretting the poor Count's purpose, for about eleven miles. Then they came to a cross-road through the forest.

"I'll go down here," said the giant, "and leave you among your

The Poor Count's Christmas

friends at Fairy Elms, where you want to go."

"I'm not sure that I do want to go there just now," said the fairy. "I think I should like to go with you to your grandfather's uncle's castle, and see what your prospects are. If you find he is still alive, shall you wait?"

"I guess not," said the giant, laughing. "But you can come along with me, and we'll see how things stand."



BEFORE very long, they came to a great castle, and a warder stood before the gate.

“Ho, warder!” cried the giant when he came up. “How goes it with my grandfather’s uncle, the old giant Omscrag?”

“He has been dead a month,” said the warder, “and his property is all divided among his heirs.”

“That is not so,” roared the giant. “I am one of his heirs, and I haven’t got anything.”

The Poor Count's Christmas

"I don't know anything about it," said the warder. "I was told to give that message to every one who came, and I've given it to you."

"Who told you to give it?" cried the giant.

"My master, Katofan, who is the old giant's principal heir, and who now owns the castle."

"Katofan!" exclaimed the giant. "What impudence! He's a ninth cousin by marriage. Where is he? I want to see him."

"I don't think he is well enough to see anybody to-day," said the warder.



THE YOUNG GIANT FELDAR COMPELS THE WARDER TO OPEN
THE SICK GIANT'S CASTLE-GATE



The Poor Count's Christmas

“Open that gate!” the giant roared, “or I shall plunge your family into woe!”

The warder turned pale, and opened the gate as wide as it would go, while the giant, with the fairy on his finger, walked boldly in.

In a large inner hall, sitting before a great fire, they saw a giant so tall and thin that he looked as if he had been made of great fishing-poles. He turned uneasily in his chair when he saw his visitor, and was going to say something about being too unwell to receive company, when our young giant,

The Poor Count's Christmas

whose name was Feldar, interrupted him by calling out, in a tremendous voice:

“Well, now, Katofan, I should like to know what all this means! How did you come to be heir to this castle?”

“Because it descended to me from my good old relative and friend,” said the other.

“I expect there are a hundred heirs, who have a better right to it than you,” said our giant. “The truth is, no doubt, that you were here when my grandfather’s uncle died, and that you took possession, and have since kept everybody out.”

The Poor Count's Christmas

"Oh, no," said the thin giant, "the other heirs have had a share of the fortune." 189199

"How many of them?" said Feldar, "and how much did they get?"

"As many as two or three of them," said the other, "and they got some very nice things in the way of ornaments and curiosities."

"Well," said Feldar, stretching himself up high, "I am one of the heirs to this property, and I want my share of it. Who attends to the dividing business? Do you do it yourself?"

"Oh, no!" said the thin giant. "I am not well enough for that."

The Poor Count's Christmas

I cannot go about much. But I will send for my dividing-agent. I had to employ one, there was so much to do. He will see that you get your share."

He then rang a bell, and a small man appeared. When the fairy saw him, she could not help laughing, but her laugh was such a little one that no one noticed it. He had a bushy head of hair, which was as black as ink on one side and as white as milk on the other. Looking at him from one side, he seemed quite young, and from the other side, quite old.

"Flipkrak," said the thin giant,



FELDAR INTERVIEWS THE SICK GIANT



The Poor Count's Christmas

"this is another heir to this property; we overlooked him when we made our division. I wish you would take him, as you did the others, and let him choose something that he would like to have."

"Certainly," said Flipkrak. "This way, good sir," and he went out of a side-door, followed closely by Feldar.

"How would you like a hinge?" cried the thin giant, as they reached the door. "There are some very handsome and odd hinges, nearly new. If you take one, you might some day get another to match it, and then you would have

The Poor Count's Christmas

a nice pair all ready when you put up a new door."

Feldar stopped a moment in the doorway.

"I'll look at them," he answered, and then went on.

"Here, good sir," said Flipkrak, showing the young giant into a large room, "is a collection of most beautiful articles. You can choose any one of them, or even two if you like. They will be admirable mementos of your deceased relative."

Feldar looked around. There were all sorts of brass and iron ornaments, old pieces of furniture

The Poor Count's Christmas

and various odds and ends, of little value.

"A nice lot of rubbish," said the young giant. "If I ever have any holes to fill up, on my ground, I may send for a few wagon-loads of it. Suppose we look through the rest of the castle?"

"Oh, good sir," said the dividing-agent, "the things in the rest of the castle belong to my good master!"

"You can come if you choose," said Feldar, striding away, "or you can stay behind," and the poor man, frightened, ran after him as fast as he could.

The Poor Count's Christmas

The young giant walked through several of the vast rooms of the castle. "I see you have a great deal of very fine furniture here," he said to Flipkrak, "and I need furniture. I will mark some of it with this piece of chalk, and you can send it to me."

"Oh, yes, good sir," cried the dividing-agent, quite pleased at this. "We can send it to you after you go away."

Feldar took a piece of chalk from his pocket, and marked enough furniture to furnish an ordinary castle.

"This kind of chalk will not rub

The Poor Count's Christmas

off," he said, "and I've marked the things where it won't show. But don't overlook any of them. Now, where are your money-vaults?"

"Oh, good sir!" cried the dividing-agent, "you can't go there, we don't divide any of—I mean we haven't any money-vaults!"

"Give me the key," said Feldar.

"Oh, good sir!" cried Flipkrak, shaking with terror, "I must not let that go out of my keeping—I mean I haven't got it."

The giant made no answer, but taking the dividing-agent by the heels, he held him upside down in

The Poor Count's Christmas

the air, and shook him. A big key dropped from his pockets.

"That's the key, no doubt," said the giant, putting the man down, and picking up the key. "I can find the vault by myself. I won't trouble you any more."

But as he went down to the lower parts of the castle, the dividing-agent ran after him, wailing and tearing his two-colored hair.

When he reached the money-vault, Feldar easily opened the door and walked in. Great bags of gold and silver, each holding about a bushel, were piled up around the walls. Feldar took out his piece



THE YOUNG GIANT'S WAY OF GETTING THE KEY



The Poor Count's Christmas

of chalk, and marked about a dozen of those bags which held the gold coin.

“Oh, that’s right, good sir,” cried Flipkrak, feeling a little better. “We can send them to you after you go away.”

“What is in those small bags, on that shelf?” asked Feldar.

“Those are diamonds, good sir,” said the agent; “you can mark some of them if you like.”

“I will mark one,” said the giant to the fairy, who was securely nestled in the ruffles of his shirt-bosom, “and that I will give to you.”

The Poor Count's Christmas

"To me!" exclaimed Flipkrak, who did not see the fairy; "what does he mean by that?"

"Thank you," said the little creature, in delight. "Diamonds are so lovely! How glad I am that your grandfather's uncle died!"

"You shouldn't say that," said the giant. "It isn't proper."

"But you feel glad, don't you?" she asked.

"I don't talk about it, if I do," said Feldar. Then turning to the dividing-agent, he told him that he thought he had marked all the bags he wanted.

"All right, good sir," said Flip-

The Poor Count's Christmas

krak, "we will send them to you, very soon—very soon."

"Oh, you needn't trouble yourself about that," said Feldar; "I will take them along with me." And so saying, he put the bag of diamonds in one of his coat-pockets, and began to pile the bags of money on his shoulders.

The dividing-agent yelled and howled with dismay, but it was of no use. Feldar loaded himself with his bags, and walked off, without even looking at Flipkrak, who was almost crazy at seeing so much of his master's treasure boldly taken away from him.

The Poor Count's Christmas

Feldar stopped for a moment in the great hall, where the thin giant was still sitting before the fire.

"I've taken my share of the money," he said, "and I've marked a lot of furniture and things which I want you to send me, inside of a week. Do you understand?"

The thin giant gave one look at the piles of bags on Feldar's shoulders, and fainted away. He had more money left than he could possibly use, but he could not bear to lose the least bit of the wealth he had seized upon.

"What in the world are you go-

The Poor Count's Christmas

ing to do with all that money?" the fairy asked.

"I am going to give one bag of it to Count Cormo, so that he can offer the children a decent Christmas-tree, and the rest I shall carry to my castle on Shattered Crag."

"I don't believe the Count will take it," said the fairy. "He's awfully proud, and he would say that you were giving the Christmas feasts and not he. I wish you would let me manage this affair for you."

"Well, I will," said the giant.

"All right," cried the fairy, clap-

The Poor Count's Christmas

ping her hands. "I'll do the thinking, and you can do the working. It's easy for me to think."

"And it's just as easy for me to work," said Feldar, with hearty good-will.



THE day before Christmas, poor Count Cormo sat, quite disconsolate, in his castle-hall, before a hearth where there was no fire. He had sold his family bedstead, but he had received very little money for it. People said such old bedsteads were not worth much, even if they were inlaid with precious metals. So he had been able only to prepare a small tree, on which he had hung the cheapest kind of presents, and his feast was very plain and simple. The Countess, indeed, was afraid

The Poor Count's Christmas

the things would not go around, for their old servant had told them that he had heard there would be more children at the castle the next day than had ever been there before. She was in favor of giving up the whole affair and of sending the children home as soon as they should come.

“What is the use,” she said, “of having them here, when we have so little to give them? They will get more at home; and then if they don’t come we shall have the things for ourselves.”

“No, no, my dear,” said the Count; “this may be the last time

The Poor Count's Christmas

that we shall have the children with us, for I do not see how we can live much longer in this sorrowful condition, but the dear girls and boys must come to-morrow. I should not wish to die knowing that we had missed a Christmas. We must do the best with what we have, and I am sure we can make them happy if we try. And now let us go to bed, so as to be up early to-morrow."

The Countess sighed. There was only one little bedstead, and the poor Count had to sleep on the floor.

Christmas-day dawned bright,

The Poor Count's Christmas

clear, and sparkling. The Count was in good spirits.

"It is a fine day," he said to his wife, "and that is a great thing for us."

"We need all we can get," said the Countess, "and it is well for us that fine days do not cost anything."

Very soon the Count heard the sound of many merry voices, and his eyes began to sparkle.

"They are coming!" he cried, and threw open the door of the castle, and went to meet his little guests; but when he saw them he started back.

The Poor Count's Christmas

"What do you think?" he exclaimed to the Countess, who stood behind him. "There is a long procession of them, and they are headed by a giant—the young giant Feldar! Who ever heard of such a thing as a giant coming to a children's festival! He will eat up everything we have in a few mouthfuls!"

"You might as well let him do it!" said the Countess. "There won't be enough for the others, anyway. There seem to be hundreds of them; and if there isn't a band of music striking up!"

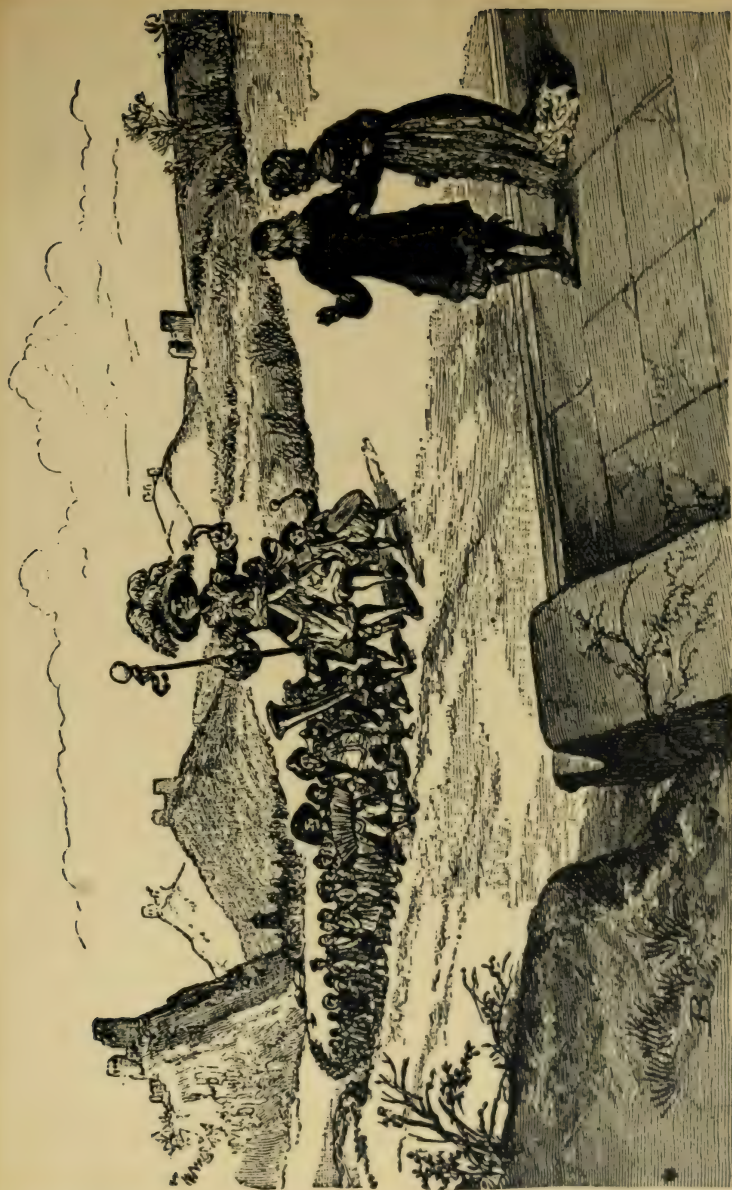
Sure enough, quite a procession

The Poor Count's Christmas

was approaching the castle. First came the giant Feldar, with Tillette, the little fairy, on his finger; then four or five musicians; and after them a long line of children, all dressed in their best clothes, and marching two by two.

“Merry Christmas!” shouted the giant, as soon as he saw Count Cormo, and then all the children shouted “Merry Christmas!” until the castle courtyard echoed with the cheerful greeting, while the band played loudly and merrily.

“Come in, my dears,” cried the Count to the children. “I am glad to see you. But as for you, good



QUITE A PROCESSION WAS APPROACHING THE CASTLE

The Poor Count's Christmas

giant, I fear my door is not quite large enough. But perhaps you can stoop and squeeze yourself in."

"Count Cormo!" cried the fairy, from the giant's finger. "I have a plan to propose."

The good Count looked up in surprize.

"If it isn't a dear little fairy!" he exclaimed. "Why, certainly, if you have a plan to propose, I shall be happy to hear it."

"Well, then," said Tillette, "suppose we go first into the great hall in the old wing of the castle. That is so large that it will hold us all, and we can have a grand dance,

The Poor Count's Christmas

if we feel like it, after we get there."

"I am afraid that the great hall would be very uncomfortable," said the Count. "No one has lived in it, nor even entered it, so far as I know, for many years; and everything must be covered with dust and cobwebs."

"But it would be so nice to march around that great hall, with the music and everything. I don't believe there's any dust."

"Well, then," said the Count, "as you seem to have set your heart on it, we'll go."

So the Count and the Countess

The Poor Count's Christmas

put on their hats and took their places in the procession, at the head of the line of children and just behind the musicians. Then they all marched across the great courtyard to the old wing of the castle, and when they reached the doors of the great hall, the giant swung them open, and everybody entered.

Never were there two such astonished people as the Count and the Countess!

Right in the middle of the hall stood a great Christmas-tree, which the giant had brought in on his shoulders from the woods. On the

The Poor Count's Christmas

wide-spreading branches of this tall tree were hung hundreds of presents and sparkling ornaments.

“What does this mean?” gasped the Count. “Whose tree is this?”

“It is yours! It is yours!” cried all the children in a merry chorus which made the old walls ring. “It is your Christmas-tree, and we, the children, who love you, give it to you!”

The Count looked around from one to another of the children, but did not say a word. His heart was too full for him to speak. Then the giant put the fairy on his shirt-frill, and, stooping

The Poor Count's Christmas

down, took up the Count and Countess, one in each hand, holding them gently but very firmly, and carried them around the tree, raising them up and down, so that they could see all the presents, even those at the very top.

Everything was labeled—not with the name of the person they were for, for they were all for the Count and Countess, but with the names of those who gave them.

Presently, the Count began to read every name aloud, and each time a child's name was called, all the other children would clap and cheer. There were a good many

The Poor Count's Christmas

small bags, which looked as if they were very heavy, hanging here and there, and these were all marked "From Feldar," while some beautiful clusters of diamonds, which glittered in the sunlight that poured in through the windows, were labeled "From Tillette."

It took a long time to look at all the presents, which were rather different from the things generally seen on Christmas-trees, for the great branches and boughs held every kind of useful and ornamental articles that the Count and Countess needed. Many of these were old family treasures which they once

The Poor Count's Christmas

had owned, but had been obliged to sell, to keep up their Christmas festivals.

The Count and his wife were more and more delighted as they were carried around the tree, but at last this happy business was over, and the giant put them down upon the floor.

“Now for a dance!” cried the fairy, in her clear little voice, and the music struck up, while all the children began to dance gayly around the tree.

The Count and Countess, with the giant and the fairy, stood aside while this happy play was going

The Poor Count's Christmas

on, enjoying it almost as much as the children, but when the dancing began to flag, the Count thought that the time had now come when the party ought to have something to eat, and his heart failed him when he thought of the very meager repast he had to offer them.

But he need not have troubled his mind about that. As soon as the dance was done, the giant stepped to a door which led to another apartment, and throwing it open he cried:

“Enter the banqueting-hall! This is the feast the children give to the good Count Cormo and his wife.

The Poor Count's Christmas

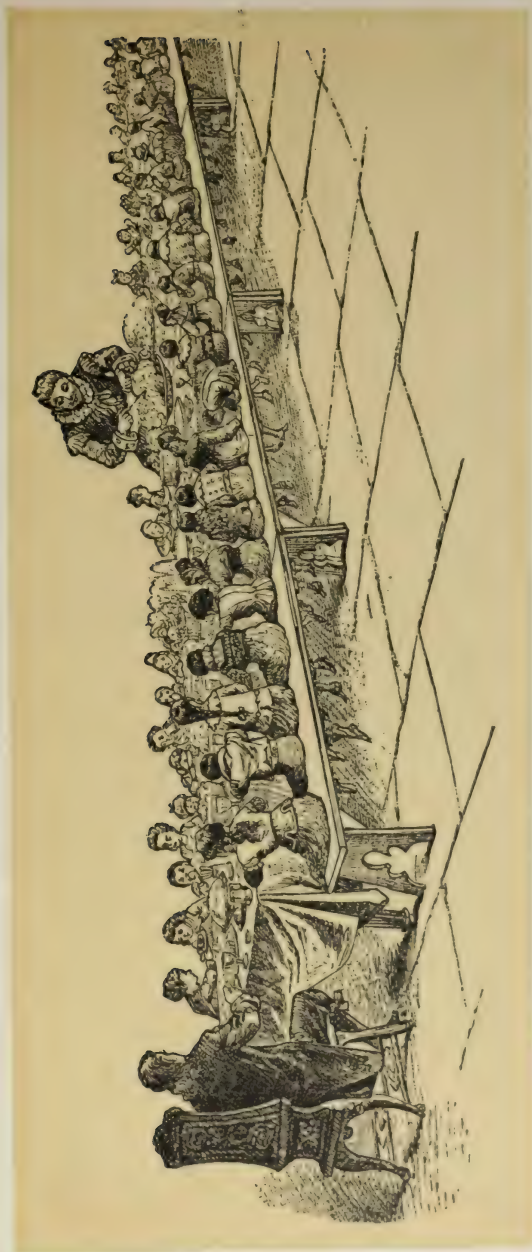
He has feasted them often and often, and made them happy for many a Christmas. It is their turn now."

Everybody trooped through the door, the children gently pushing the Count and Countess before them. The room was truly a banqueting-hall. A long table was covered with every kind of thing good to eat, and, on smaller tables in the corners, was ever so much more, in case it should be needed. Here and there, on the long table were enormous cakes, great bowls of jelly, and vast pies. Everybody knew these were for the giant.

The Poor Count's Christmas

The Count and Countess took their places at the head and foot of the table; and all the children gathered around, and everybody had a splendid appetite. Just in the center of the table there was a little table about three inches high, on which there were dear little morsels of the dainties the others were eating. At this table, on a little chair, the fairy Tillette sat, where she could see everything, and she enjoyed herself as much as anybody else did.

When the banquet was over, they all went into the great hall, where they had dances and games and



THE COUNT AND HIS HAPPY GUESTS ENJOY THE CHRISTMAS FEAST



The Poor Count's Christmas

singing, and there never was a merrier company before.

When evening approached the Count stood up and made a little speech. He tried to tell the children how good he thought they were, and how happy they had made him. He did not say much, but they all understood him. When he had finished there was a silence over the whole room. The children looked at one another, some of them smiled, and then, all together, as if they had planned it out before, they cried:

“The giant and the fairy did it

The Poor Count's Christmas

all. He gave us the money and she told us what to buy.”

“Oh, pshaw!” said the young giant, his face turning very red; “I thought nothing was to be said about that,” and he went outside so that nobody should make a speech to him.

Now all the children came up, and each in turn bade the Count and Countess farewell, and then, headed by the giant's band of music, and singing merrily, they marched away to their homes.

But Count Corno would not let the giant and the fairy go away so soon. He made them come with

The Poor Count's Christmas

him to the dwelling part of his castle, and there, after a little squeezing and stooping by the giant, at the door, they all sat down around the hearth, on which a fine blazing fire had been built.

“I don’t know what to say, my dear Feldar,” said the Count, “and I can never repay you—”

The giant was just about to exclaim that the Count need not say anything, and that he did not wish to be repaid, when, seeing he felt embarrassed, the fairy broke in:

“Oh, yes, dear Count, you can repay him. You can adopt him. You have no children, you are get-

The Poor Count's Christmas

ting old, and are living alone. He has no parents,—even his grandfather's uncle is now dead,—and he lives all by himself in his castle on the Shattered Crag. He is rich, and you can show him how to do good with his great wealth. He could come and live in the old wing of the castle, where the rooms are so large; the furniture he has inherited could be sent here, and you could all be so happy together! Will you take him?"

The Count's eyes filled with tears.

"Would you like us to adopt you?" he said to Feldar.



COUNT CORNO ADOPTS THE YOUNG GIANT



The Poor Count's Christmas

"Indeed I should," was the reply. Then the young giant kneeled on the floor; and the Count got up on a table, and put his hands on the young giant's head, and adopted him.

"Now you ought to adopt her," said Feldar, after he had kissed the Count and the Countess, and had sat down again by the fire.

"No," said Tillette, "I can not be adopted. But I will often come to see you, and we shall be happy together, and the children will have a splendid Christmas festival every year."

The Poor Count's Christmas

"As long as we live," said the Count and Countess.

"As long as I live," said Feldar.

When the Count and Countess went up to their room, that night, there they found the family bedstead, all cleaned and polished, with its gold and silver ornaments sparkling like new.

"What a happy Christmas I have had!" said good Count Cormo.

